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Probers won't quiz Carter face to face in Billy affair

By HARRISON RAINIE

Washington (News Bureau)—The special Senate panel investigating Billy Carter's ties to Libya decided today not to question President Carter directly about his links to the case and instead agreed to have a written exchange of questions and answers with White House lawyers to clear up any "loose ends."

The decision not to confront the President and take sworn testimony from him appeared to signal that committee members feel there is no evidence of wrongdoing that merits cross-examination of the President himself.

"It is fair to assume that the President has already said what he has to say on the important issues," committee counsel Philip Tone said. "We expect nothing more of major consequence."

After a nearly two hours in a closed-door meeting, panel chairman Birch Bayh (D-Ind.) emerged to say that no formal vote had been taken on how to get additional information from the White House. He said that those at the session decided that committee lawyers should deal with White House lawyers to get the last bits of factual information the probers feel they need.

BAYH AND THE committee's vice chairman, Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.), left open the possibility that future developments in the case could cause them to change their minds and seek a direct confrontation with the President. However, they indicated this was not likely.

Thurmond confirmed that the

panel's report to Congress on Oct. 4 will only be an "interim report" about Billy and his dealings with Libya and the White House and that it might not contain final conclusions about the propriety of actions by Carter administration officials toward Billy and the Libyans.

Not all committee members were pleased with the outcome. Bayh said at least one wanted to have the President questioned directly under oath. But he added that he felt "this was not the time to raise these questions."

One unhappy committee member was Sen. Dennis DeConcini (D-Ariz.), who charged that the Justice Department was impeding his probe of fugitive financier Robert L. Vesco and Vesco's possible ties to the case. DeConcini had tried to work out arrangements to have the fugitive allowed to reenter the United States from his Bahamas hideout to give Senate testimony, but the department refused to promise Vesco would not be arrested if he set foot on U.S. soil.

MEANWHILE, BILLY came to the Capitol to give his final deposition to committee staffers. He dismissed as "ridiculous" a suggestion that he made a flurry of telephone calls intended to capitalize on a meeting the President held with a Libyan official.

The questioning covered a number of discrepancies between Billy's public testimony this month and evidence from other witnesses.

In addition, the committee released a sanitized version of the testimony given by CIA Director Stansfield Turner two weeks ago in closed session.